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Castro Crowded a Year Ago; Now Time Tests His Rule

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CPYRGHT

For Fidel Castro April 17 was a great day. He had his picture taken in the gun turret of a tank, the very model of a grim and weary, but triumphant military man.

Castro—and communism—won that day. The United States lost. But that was only one battle. The war goes on.

One year has now passed, or will have next Tuesday, since the photographer immortalized Castro, bearded and wearing a green U. S.-made field jacket.

He had come into power 15½ months earlier. For two long years before that he had waged a guerrilla war against the tyranny of Fulgencio Batista, who had been given considerable U. S. aid in the name of anti-communism.

In those months, Castro had seized the vast holdings of foreigners valued in the billions, promising to pay with 20-year bonds bearing 4 per cent interest.

Started Reforms

He has begun a vast land reform program, established industrial and agricultural co-operatives. He set up schools, inaugurated a slum-clearance program, drove the gamblers, dope peddlers and prostitutes into hiding—or into more legitimate activities.

The corrupt in the old government he arrested and imprisoned. The brutal strong-arm men of the Batista regime he had shot.

At long last the people felt they were free. The hungry happily ate most of the blooded breeding stock of the foreign-owned ranches. Castro estab-

lished a 300,000-man militia and armed them initially with left-over U. S. equipment.

With increased guidance from known Communists, he moved steadily to the left. In the plush Havana hotels, once swarming with American tourists, Russian and Chinese trade missions appeared.

The \$1 billion annual trade between the United States and Cuba dwindled as the U. S., more and more convinced of Castro's anti-American, pro-Communist attitudes, applied economic pressures. One was denying Cuba access to the American sugar market.

Betrayal Suspected

Some Cubans began accusing him of betraying the revolution. Castro's militia ruthlessly stamped out opposition. Firing squads worked overtime. At least 639 people—the known count—were shot against prison walls. The police state came to Cuba, population 6½ million.

Out of Cuba came doctors, agronomists, salesmen, mechanics, managers and engineers. In time, about 250,000 refugees accumulated in Miami. The United States, through the Central Intelligence Agency, began recruiting anti-Castro Cubans.

Invaders Start Arriving

In the jungles of Guatemala and elsewhere, a Cuban liberation force, 1,500 strong, took shape. They had U. S. arms and were trained by U. S. agents.

But all was not well. Some former Batista adherents were given command functions. They wined and dined those who had opposed Batista. Among the refugees there was no unity, and still less.

When it was April 17, the day the U. S.-backed forces were to

begin the overthrow of the new tyrant. Two days before, some World War II B-26 bombers attacked Castro's airfields, knocking out four of Castro's U. S.-made T-33 training jobs.

Now a couple of old cargo ships were standing off the Bay of Pigs with the main invasion force. From the beach, a single road led to a junction that led to the heart of Cuba. The road was flanked by mangrove swamps.

The 1,500 men had come to do battle with Castro's tank-equipped forces, supported by artillery. They landed at a point quickly and easily reached by Castro's reserves. An invasion was no secret. The refugees talked freely.

No Help From Natives

Apparently the invaders assumed the Cuban people would rise and join them. There was a flaw. Nobody had told the people the invasion was actually in progress.

Post-invasion reports indicated the invasion ships weren't even loaded for combat. One ship carried armor, communications equipment and anti-tank guns. It was a neat package and it was sunk.

Reports similarly indicated the necessity of establishing air supremacy over the landing area was ignored. Castro simply rolled his tanks and artillery into position and plastered the invaders. Armed jet trainers swept the skies clean of opposition and then concentrated on the ground troops.

Only one thing could have saved the invasion force: U. S. jets armed with rockets and jelled gasoline, both effective against tanks, ground personnel and artillery.

Of the total force, 1,214 were captured. The others were killed. Pro-Castro Cubans were slain. The "Cuban North" had suffered an

ominous defeat. There were anti-U. S. demonstrations. In the aftermath of the fiasco, Castro was able to tighten his already strong grip.

Cuba Goes Communist

On April 30, Ernesto (Che) Guevara, Castro's economic adviser, outlined a four-year plan to make Cuba independent economically. He said there were 187 Communist technicians, including 79 Russians, in the country to help.

On May 1, Castro declared Cuba a "socialist" nation and said there would be no more elections.

The United States already

had recognized the danger in Latin America of Castro's appeal to the poverty-stricken and his defiance of the United States.

This recognition led President Kennedy to create the Alliance for Progress in March 1961. Ultimately, the United States set up a \$20 billion program of loans or grants—mostly loans—to Latin American countries over the next 10 years.

Swap Falls Through

After the invasion, Castro offered to swap prisoners to the United States for bulldozers. A committee was formed to free

the prisoners by providing 600 light agricultural tractors. There weren't 600 heavy duty bulldozers in the country available. Castro held out for bulldozers and the swap fell through.

In the wake of the invasion, grain shipments from Russia, Czechoslovakia and Red China rose to \$100 million worth. The economic well-being of Cuba was tied directly to that of the Communist bloc in deals in which Cuba was to swap sugar for needed goods.

In the U. S. there were charges that there had been a serious breakdown in intelligence. Before another year, the three top men in the CIA resigned, although everybody involved insisted the administration had nothing to do with Cuba.

Meanwhile, political and economic measures have been putting increasing pressure on Cuba. The Organization of American States narrowly ousted Cuba last January. President Kennedy on Feb. 3 embargoed trade with Cuba.

Economy Weakens

So Washington waits, hoping perhaps Castro's inefficiency may bring about the collapse. The Cuban economy appears

in a mess. Food is rationed. At the end of a long supply line are Russia and Red China, both short of food.

Tractors and buses are breaking down for lack of spare parts. The government admits sugar production is 33 per cent below the planned level, and blames a "lack of initiative."

Cuban silver has been replaced by nickels and copper. Castro needs silver. Castro himself has seen the emergence of a directorate of 28 as the ruling body of the nation—apparently designed to replace the leadership of the "personality."